

# **THE USE OF SUCCESSION PLANNING TO PREPARE FUTURE LEADERS IN SELECTED FEDERAL AGENCIES AT ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND, MD**

## **SENIOR SERVICE COLLEGE FELLOWSHIP STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT**

### **RESEARCH REPORT**



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## **DISCLAIMER**

The contents of this paper are the sole result of the research performed by the author. The results are the opinions solely of the author and do not reflect the opinions of the TACOM Life Cycle Management Command, the Defense Acquisition University, or the U.S. Army.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The importance of succession planning is well known in industry and in the armed forces. It provides a venue for an orderly transition of command and control responsibilities to a designated person who is preselected and groomed to take on higher responsibilities with minimal to no disruption of ongoing operations in case the incumbent leaves his/her position. There is a significant amount of literature available on this topic listing the importance of succession planning and of how, who and when to do it. The literature lists the benefits of succession planning and the best way of how to execute it. Because of its high importance it gets covered in management school extensively. Despite its high importance and extensive coverage, many organizations still lag behind in developing and/or in executing their succession plans.

Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG) in Maryland is a very large army installation with 43 major organizations and 28 suborganizations as tenants (Garrison, APG, Jan. 20, 2011). Some of the organizations located at APG have their headquarters here while their support offices are located in other states and overseas. Most of these organizations manage a significant amount of acquisition related projects. Because of the diversity of their missions and functions, as well as the projected shortage of acquisition related funding in future years, it is essential for these organizations to have a well developed and executed succession plan for a smooth transition of leadership.

This study was conducted to determine whether selected federal agencies at APG have succession plans in place to identify and prepare their talented employees for future senior level positions. Data for the study was obtained through both written surveys and interviews of key personnel of select federal agencies at APG between Feb. 16 and March 14, 2011. Agencies that participated in the survey were selected at random with a single criterion that they employ a large number of people. A key finding from the survey was that none of the participating agencies had any type of formal succession plan in place because of several reasons. Most of them, however, recognized the importance of succession planning and were following informal processes to prepare their key personnel for senior level positions in their organizations.



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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE**

### **Introduction**

In a well-managed private sector organization, when executives quit, retire, or are dismissed, replacements are chosen through leadership succession — an orderly process of identifying and grooming people to replace managers. Succession planning is linked to leadership development in two important ways. First, grooming a successor is part of leadership development. Second, the process of choosing and fostering a successor is part of manager’s own development (Dubrin, 2010).

There are hundreds and hundreds of books and articles on succession planning. Almost every book on leadership and management talks about succession planning — the importance and benefit of it, how it should be done, what happens if it is not done, and issues related to its implementation. A few magazines also are published on supporting topics such as mentoring, talent management, and lessons learned. There are several organizations with the sole purpose of helping others in succession planning. There is no dearth of information on succession planning.

Section 2301, Title 5 of United States Code states that under merit system principles the recruitment of a federal worker should be determined solely on the basis of relative ability, knowledge and skills, after fair and open competition that ensures all receive equal opportunity. It also says all employees and applicants for employment should receive fair and equitable treatment in all aspects of personnel management without regard to political affiliation, race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, age, or handicapping condition, and with proper regard for their privacy and constitutional rights. Therefore, it is not possible in a Federal Government agency to select and groom a candidate without him or her going through a fair and open competition. It poses a challenge for senior leaders on how to select and prepare workers for a senior level position without their first going through such an open and fair competition. And recruitment cannot occur until the incumbent has vacated the position.

### **Background of the Study**

It has been forecast over the past several years that a significantly large number of federal civil service workers will retire in the near future. Many civil service workers expected to retire have been in service for many years and are in senior level positions. Their retirement will cause a vacuum at senior levels unless talented employees have already been identified and prepared to provide a pool of candidates to fill those positions. Without available trained personnel ready to fill the voids left by retiring workers, the continuity and efficiency of agencies and programs will be negatively impacted.

In a report to Congress, the General Accounting Office (GAO, now the Government Accountability Office), reported that “career members of the Federal Government’s Senior Executive Service (SES) are critical to the execution of agency missions and the effective management of federal programs. If a significant number of them were to retire, this would result in a loss of leadership continuity,

institutional knowledge, and expertise [GAO, May 2000].” This deficiency may impact negatively on the agencies’ missions and acquisition projects. This issue will take on even greater importance in light of the fact that resources projected to be available to agencies and in particular to acquisition projects are expected to be very limited in the future.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify key succession planning practices followed by select federal agencies at APG, MD, to develop their pool of future leaders. This study is expected to benefit agencies that are developing their own succession plans. Without a well- prepared and well-executed succession plan, an agency or a program would not be considered ready to adequately fill its leadership positions when the current senior leaders retire in the near future.

Succession planning in every Department of Defense (DoD) agency is highly important, especially in light of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics (USD (AT&L)) Dr. Ashton Carter’s guidance memorandum of Nov. 3, 2010, on accomplishing DoD acquisition projects with limited resources. It is believed that a well- prepared and well-executed succession plan would help identify and develop a pool of highly qualified candidates who would be prepared and available to fill the senior ranks without interrupting the agencies/programs’ work performance upon retirement of the current leaders.

This study also identifies the most common succession planning practices of selected federal agencies at APG. And it identifies strengths and weaknesses of those practices and highlights how agencies have overcome those weaknesses. This study refrains from evaluating the succession planning practices of any particular agency with an understanding that the operating parameters of every agency are different. This study lists some of the best succession planning practices of industry, as noted in literature, for the purpose of comparison and with an understanding that some of those practices or their modified versions may be applicable in federal agency.

## **Significance of the Study**

Over the past several years, it has been predicted by senior leaders and human resource personnel within the federal government that a large number of federal civil service workers would become eligible and most likely retire in the near future. This sudden and large retirement of people would create a big void. Many senior leaders of agencies fall into this category.

This impending wave of retirements of senior leaders requires that a pool of highly qualified candidates be prepared and available to fill senior ranks for sake of a smooth transition and program continuity. More recent reports have indicated that the coming retirement wave may have been postponed a little because of the nation’s ongoing economic condition, drop in value of employees’ retirement funds in 2008, and the recent change in federal policy regarding taking sick leave into account in calculating retirement benefits under the Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS) pension plan.

Unfortunately, this retirement wave is expected to surge as the nation’s economic conditions improve.

It takes time to identify and develop a pool of candidates for senior level positions. It is often said it takes many years to build a culture in an organization. Without training a pool of candidates who are already part of the current leadership's culture, the organization would lose program continuity and efficiency when the current leader retires and the new leader is not familiar with the previous culture. Thus, it is very important for all federal agencies to develop and implement an effective succession plan in their organizations at the earliest. Without adequate preparation, the agencies may not be ready to fill upcoming vacancies at senior levels. This issue has become even of higher importance considering that limited resources are expected to be the norm in the future. Any delay in filling an agency's key senior level position with a highly qualified candidate promptly is expected to impact negatively on the agency/program's cost, schedule, and performance and may cause further strain on DoD resources.

### **Brief Overview of Research Methodology**

An applied research methodology was followed to collect information for this project. Research performed is of a descriptive category. Qualitative data for this research was collected from senior leaders of select federal agencies at APG through an electronic survey method and face-to-face interviews.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this research was to verify the assumption that federal agencies at APG have succession plans in place for their key senior level positions. Also, it was intended to verify that the people identified by agencies to fill senior level positions, as they are occur, receive the necessary formal and informal training to prepare them for leadership positions.

### **Research Hypothesis**

Two hypotheses for this research are:

- H1: Select federal agencies at APG have succession plans for key senior level positions.
- H2: People identified for succession receive formal and informal training to prepare them for key senior level positions

### **Limitations of this Research**

Every effort was made to survey the senior-most leaders of select federal agencies at APG that have a large number of employees to validate an assumption that they have succession plans in place to prepare a pool of candidates to fill senior level positions as, and when, they become available in order to maintain program continuity and avoid any disruption. The survey questionnaire was sent to senior leaders of 37 of 71 organizations located at APG. The organizations were selected at random for the survey. There is a potential of error that the selected 37 agencies may not be truly representative of organizations located at APG. Out of that pool of 37 senior leaders, only 14 senior leaders or their representatives responded to the survey. This response rate of 38 percent limits the power of analysis. It is possible that those who responded to the survey had a strong view on

succession planning and wanted to provide their input or that the leaders who did not respond were on travel and could not provide response. Thus, it is not feasible to make a conclusive statement based upon the survey results. However, it is worth giving more weight to an issue on which all 14 respondents said the same thing. The findings from the research may provide a glimpse on several activities/actions that agencies are taking in support of succession planning.

## DEFINITION OF KEY WORDS AND TERMS

Cohort	a group of people who share a particular time together during a particular time span (Google).
Competence	skill level of employees (Ulrich, 1998).
Commitment	self-motivation of employees to do good work (Ulrich, 1998).
Developing a pool of candidates	combines evaluating potential with giving high-potential individuals the right type of developmental experiences (Dubrin, 2010).
Knowledge worker	<p>an individual who is valued for his/her ability to interpret information within a specific subject area. Knowledge workers often advance the overall understanding of that subject area through analysis, design, and development (Drucker, 2002).</p> <p>Knowledge workers are fueled by expertise, insight, and research skills. Knowledge workers use these skills to define problems, identify alternatives, and implement solutions in an effort to influence organization decisions, priorities, and strategies.</p>
Leadership development	expanding a person's capacity to be effective in leadership roles (Mathis, 2008).
Leadership succession	an orderly process of identifying and grooming people to replace managers (Dubrin, 2010).
Lessons learned	to bring any knowledge gained during a project that can be usefully applied on future projects.
Mentoring	a process involving anyone who provides guidance, support, knowledge, and opportunities for whatever period the mentor and protégé deem this help to be necessary (Washburn, 2007).
Organizational culture	norms, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions that influence organizational practices, tacit norms, and values (Knorr, 2005).
Succession planning	is linked to leadership development in two important ways. First, being groomed as a successor is part of leadership development. Second, the process of choosing and fostering a successor is part of a manager's own

	development (Dubrin, 2010).
Talent	equivalent to the definition of intellectual capital as identified in the context of this study.
Talent development	equivalent to the definition of talent management as identified below in the context of this study.
Talent management	the process and practices of an organization that are focused on enhancing the attraction, development, and retention of key human resources in the organization (Mathis, 2008).
Training and development	programs that enhance employee's overall achievement and performance through acquisition of skills, credentials, and knowledge (Knorr, 2005).

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## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Over the past 30 years, the federal acquisition workforce has evolved causing senior-level professionals to have a greater share of knowledge and experience. The consequence of this one-sided shift of knowledge to senior level professionals is that the knowledge can rapidly disappear when the senior level professionals decide to retire within a fairly short time. (Bill Kaplan, “Leveraging Our Critical Knowledge,” *Defense AT&L*, p. 11, January-February 2008).

In the 2009 edition of their book, “Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done,” Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan make a case that “one of the most important parts of an executive job is to pass the knowledge he has acquired over the years to the next generation of leaders. It’s how an executive gets results today and leave a legacy that the executive can take pride in when he moves on” (Bossidy, 2009, p.74). It further discusses the importance of “developing the leadership pipeline through continuous improvement, succession depth, and reducing retention risk,” and a leadership assessment matrix to identify those who are ready for a bigger role vs. those who need to be replaced (Bossidy, 2009, p.150).

In “Succession Planning—Key to Corporate Excellence,” Arthur X. Deegan II notes that the specific purpose of succession planning is to provide an organized approach for the most effective identification and utilization of the organization’s management resources (Deegan, 1986, p.7). In the Sixth edition of the book “Leadership—Research Findings, Practice, and Skills,” Andrew J. Dubrin notes that in a well-managed organization, replacements for executives who quit, retire, or are dismissed are chosen through leadership succession, an orderly process of identifying and grooming people to replace managers (“Leadership,” 2010, p. 461).

With predictions ranging from one-third to one-half of today’s workers eligible to retire in the next five years, succession planning is a means to address what has recently been termed the “crisis in human capital.” Viewing employees as “human capital” means seeing them as assets or investments to be valued and managed, rather than “human resources” that are consumed with the goal of minimizing costs. Once an organization’s employees are viewed as human capital, their value is recognized as critical to the organization’s success and even viability (GSA, Succession Planning Guide, Summer 2001, p. S3).

The basis for dealing successfully with staffing surprises is succession planning. When a sudden loss of a manager occurs, the void is a serious problem (Beverly Behan, “Lessons from BofA: Avoiding a Succession Debacle,” *Business Week*, Oct. 6, 2009).

In the 13th edition of “Human Resource Management,” Robert L. Mathis notes that succession planning must include a well-designed employee development system to reach its potential. Succession planning is the process of identifying a plan for the orderly replacement of key employees



(Mathis, p. 288).

### **The Army Civilian Talent Management Program**

Bossidy and Charan make the case that given the many things businesses can't control, from the uncertain state of the economy to the unpredictable actions of competitors, you would think companies would pay careful attention to the one thing they can control—the quality of the people, especially those in the leadership pool. They note that an organization's human beings are its most reliable resource for generating excellent results year after year. Their judgments, experiences, and capabilities make the difference between success and failure (Bossidy, 2009, p. 109). Also, they note that although many leaders say the “people are our most important asset” they usually do not pay much attention to choosing the right people for the right job. As a result, their companies don't hire, promote, and develop the best candidates for their leadership needs.

Because of the recent Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) activities, APG's immediate concern was not whether it will have the right people in right places, but whether it will have enough qualified people to meet its needs. Recognizing potential personnel mobility and retention challenges due to BRAC, and to satisfy Army needs in the midst of two prolonged wars, the U.S. Army issued an interim policy that led to creation of the Army Civilian Talent Management Program (CTMP) in January 2009 (Department of the Army, 2009).

It is believed that CTMP would address the need of having a pool of qualified candidates for leadership successions. Specifically, the stated intent of the Army CTMP is to “provide civilians with opportunities for assignments with multiple commands and educational opportunities; cultivate senior civilian leaders with a joint mindset through joint assignments; develop senior leaders comfortable operating in global, multicultural environment and lay the groundwork for a program that will develop senior leaders” (Department of the Army, 2009).

Another objective of the CTMP is to prepare the civilian workforce in a manner similar to preparation of those serving in the institutional side of the Army so that the civilians are trained and capable of filling key positions that may become open as a result of the demands on military personnel during the ongoing conflict. These objectives are in compliance with one of the goals of Department of Defense Human Capital Strategic Plan for 2006-2010, which states that “DoD is seeking to more effectively manage its pipeline of future leaders through aligned requirement, selection, education, training and development strategies” (Department of Defense, 2006, p. 10).

### **Succession Planning from Executive Branch Perspective**

The problem of an aging workforce is very real and needs to be addressed. The average age of the civilian workforce is 46.7 years, and the number of workforce members with 30-plus years of experience continues to increase. We face losing a significant amount of corporate knowledge, experience, and capability (Testimony of Mr. Kenneth J. Krieg, USD (AT&L), *Defense AT&L* magazine, January-February 2006, p. 19).

The federal acquisition community is an experienced-based profession in which the skills and insight

necessary for success are learned primarily through education and mentorship. Also, acquisition experience and insight are found primarily in senior levels as opposed to middle and junior levels of the workforce (Bill Kaplan, “Leveraging Our Critical Knowledge,” *Defense AT&L* magazine, January-February 2008, p. 11).

In his keynote address to the Excellence in Government Conference, July 20, 2009, John Berry, director of the United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM), noted that the United States needs to be concerned about civil servants who might be looking at the private sector as they contemplate the costs of college for their kids. He noted the need to hire new workers in time not only to replace those who would be retiring but also to capture the knowledge the retiring workers have acquired over the years. He noted this as a significant concern since hundreds of thousands of civil servants would be eligible to retire in the next 10 years. The Department of Defense Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Report of Feb. 10, 2010, cited that the inadequate defense acquisition workforce as one of four chronic problem areas in the defense acquisition system. It noted that over the past 10 years, DoD’s contractual obligations have nearly tripled whereas the acquisition workforce fell more than 10 percent. It added that the Department was having great difficulty hiring qualified senior acquisition officials. It also noted that over the previous eight years the Department had operated with a very high vacancy rate.

OPM views its role regarding succession planning as providing guidance and assistance and not certifying whether agencies have a succession plan or dictate how succession should be planned (GAO, May 2000, p. 36). As part of its FY 2000 strategic planning and annual performance planning process, OPM committed to:

- Develop a data-driven model for workforce planning
- Take actions to focus agencies’ attention on the importance of executive resources planning and analysis, including succession planning.

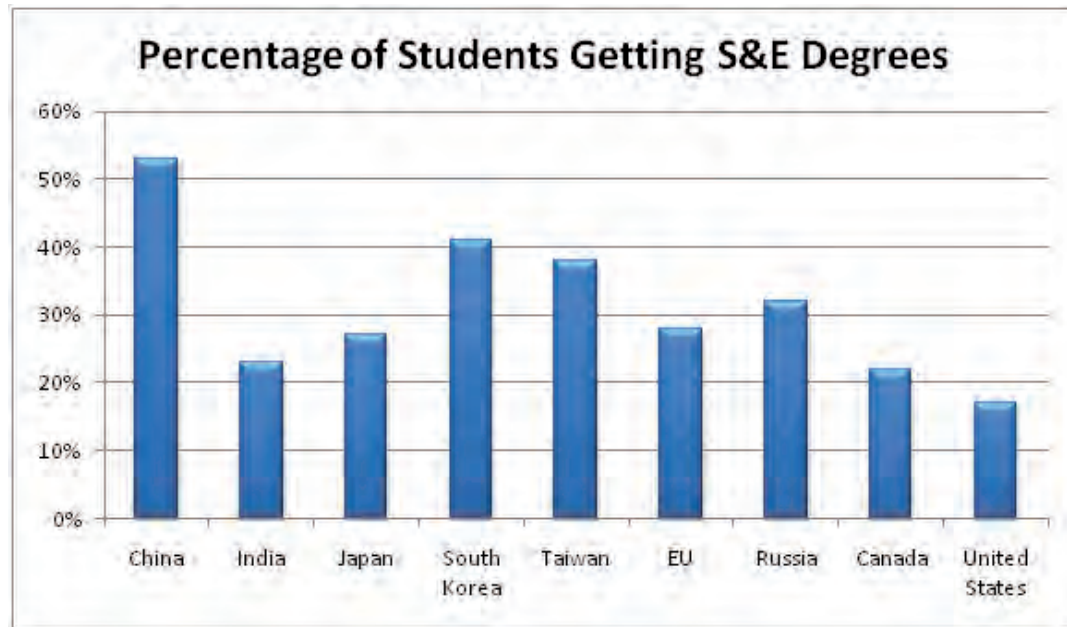
### **Succession Planning from Academic Perspective**

As more Baby Boomers near retirement age, the impact of their departure becomes more pronounced within the executive ranks of both private and public sector organizations (Grace Endres, *Organization Development Journal*, Summer 2006, p. 24). The loss of knowledge due to the retirement of Baby Boomers and an overall aging workforce is what Thomas Calo calls a “perfect storm” that managers will have to endure for many years. He notes that the previous methods of acquiring talent may not be effective in the future. A 2006 study published in *McKinsey Quarterly* noted that, while companies view the ability to manage talent effectively as a strategic priority, research indicates that senior executives largely blame themselves and their business line managers for failing to give the issue enough time and attention. They also believe that insular “silo” thinking and a lack of collaboration across the organization remain a considerable handicap. Moreover, executives who think their companies’ succession planning efforts are deficient don’t, on balance, see talent-management as an emerging problem in their organization and may not be initially supportive of actions and expenses that may be needed to address the problem.

The United States lags behind global competitors in the percentage of undergraduates earning

science and engineering (S&E) degrees (Atkinson, 2009, slide 26). This concern was expressed by USD (AT&L) in his June 2007 release of the AT&L Human Capital Strategic Plan. In this Plan, he noted that between 1997 and 2002, the number of North American students receiving an engineering degree as their initial degree remained stable at about 100,000, while Asian students receiving engineering degrees increased by 50 percent to 500,000. In 2002, only 17 percent of U.S. undergraduates earned engineering degrees, as compared to 53 percent in China (National Science Foundation (NSF), 2006) (Chart 1).

**Chart 1: Percentage of Students Getting S&E Degrees**



In addition, the U.S. global share of S&E doctorates and undergraduate degrees fell from 40 percent to 20 percent and from 30 percent to 14 percent between 1970 and 2000 (Freeman, 2006, pp. 2-3). According to the NSF, 58 percent of engineering doctorates awarded in the United States in 2003 went to noncitizens, while more than half of the students enrolled in U.S. engineering program were foreign-born.

In 2004, S&E doctorates awarded to temporary residents increased by 9 percent, compared to 2 percent for U.S. citizens (National Defense Education Program (NDEP), 2009a, p. 2). It was noted the underdeveloped countries of the world are developing at a very rapid pace causing a large demand for their highly qualified professionals. As a result, the industries in the United States have been struggling to hire the talent they need. In one case, 13 percent of the overall aerospace and defense workforce was qualified for retirement, and within 10 years the figure will grow to 50 percent. To make this issue even worse, it was reported that of the number of engineering bachelor's degrees awarded in the United States annually, many of those concentrated disciplines are not in high demand by DoD contractors (AIA, 2008, p. 3).

On a positive note, research by Dr. Alan Jenkins at the Naval Air Warfare Center suggests engineers and scientists in the Defense acquisition are easier to retain if they can see a direct linkage between

their efforts and the organization's mission (Jenkins, 2009).

### **Civilian Succession Planning**

Selection of a right person for succession in a civilian organization is as important as it is in military. If not done properly, it can result in selection of a leader who is a poor fit for his/her responsibilities. Ram Charan of "Execution" notes that 2 in 5 CEOs fail in their first 18 months on the job because of poor selection. The failure can result from a variety of factors, such as making poor decisions about new products, demoralizing the organization, or engaging in highly unethical practices. One of the most important approaches to successful succession planning is to develop enough strong leaders within the organization (Charan, 2008). Andrew Dubrin of "Leadership" notes that his approach to understanding the leadership aspects of succession focus on five topics (Dubrin, 2010):

1. Follow standard principles of human resource selection, such as thoroughly screening candidates, including speaking to several people who have worked with the individual. Background investigations also are very important.
2. Board members should be closely involved in evaluating highest-ranking managers.
3. Leadership succession should not be regarded as a detached, objective management decision. The emotional aspects of leadership succession should be considered.
4. A pool of candidates should be developed for a key leadership position.
5. Promote insiders with an outside perspective. Promoting people from within the organization offers the advantage of more hope to insiders.

### **Mentoring and Coaching**

To develop a pool of succession candidates within an organization, its top potential candidates, once identified, get paired with more senior, experienced mentors so their years of experience could be transferred through action-learning opportunities. Karacay-Aydin (2008) noted that mentoring can be an effective tool to attract, retain, motivate, and develop talent, especially for female employees and those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Duke cited PepsiCo's Chairman and CEO, an Indian mother of two daughters, as an example of a best-practice company in succession planning. Like the Army, PepsiCo recognized that a significant percentage of its executives would become retirement-eligible within five years and decided to develop a pool of candidates for senior level position, including the top position. That eventually led to PepsiCo selecting the best qualified person within the organization for the top position.

In the mentoring process, a mentor shares years of learning and experiences with his/her mentees. This process helps the mentees very rapidly learn practical leadership skills that otherwise would take them many years to learn. It also helps the mentee learn the organization's internal culture as well as how it interacts with its external stakeholders.

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## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

This research was conducted utilizing a descriptive research methodology. A survey list of 12 questions was developed to collect qualitative data from senior leaders of select federal agencies at APG through an electronic mail process. Also, a list of three questions was developed to ask senior leaders who agreed to a face-to-face interview in addition to filling out the questionnaire. In addition to identifying succession practices, another key survey goal was to solicit input on issues that agencies might have in developing and/or implementing their succession plan, and of lessons they may have learned that might benefit other organizations that have yet to develop their succession plans.

The 12 survey questionnaire was first pilot tested in a small group of people to ensure that the questions were clear, concise and sufficient to obtain comprehensive information on the status of succession planning at the respondents' organizations. The survey questions were updated, based on the input received during the pilot testing. Three questions were developed for face-to-face interviews of senior leaders.

#### **Research Perspective**

The research questions were designed to obtain qualitative data from senior leaders of agencies reflecting the position of their organizations and not of themselves. It was considered from the start of this research that organizations' perspective on this topic could be different as depends upon organization scope, size and mission. Also, it was taken into consideration that the type of work and type of personnel in an agency also influence the agency's position on succession planning. A research focused organization with a highly technical workforce may have an approach to succession planning that is different from that of a manufacturing organization, which, in turn, might differ from a storage organization.

#### **Research Design**

This research was designed to get input on succession planning from senior leaders of select government agencies through a short survey by electronic mail and through face-to-face interviews, if agreed to by the leaders. Further, this research was primarily designed to cover civilian positions only since military positions are filled through their own armed forces' selection process a few months prior to the position's availability. The military has a process for the regular rotation of uniformed personnel through military positions. This process is not relevant to civilian succession planning.

Prior to initiation of the survey, the senior leaders expected to participate in the survey were briefed about the purpose of this research study as well as the survey questions.

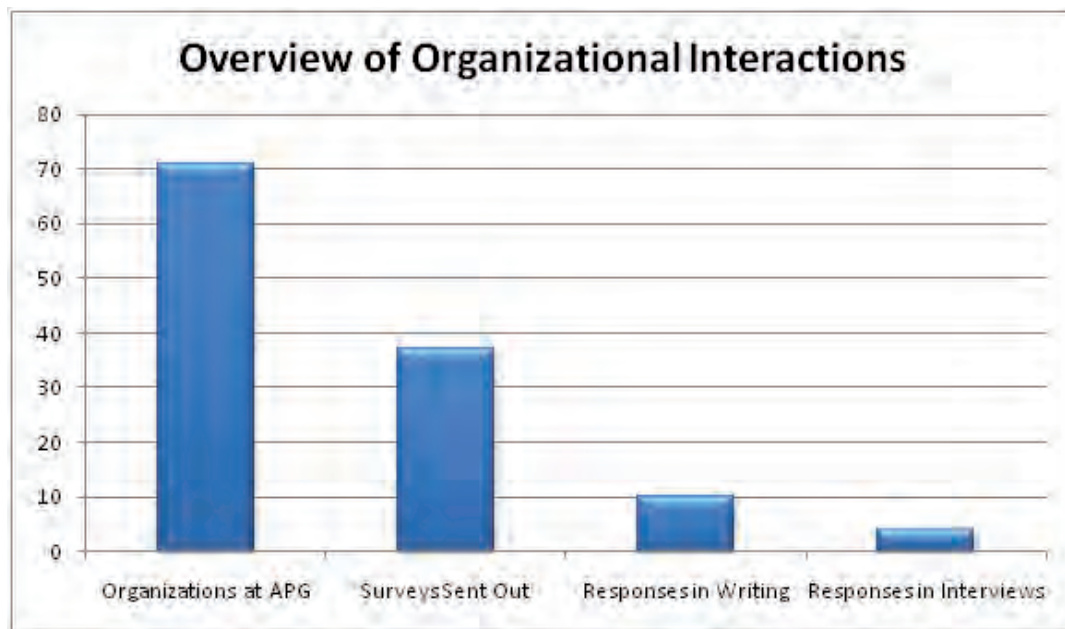


## Participation, Population, and Sample

APG is a very large army installation with 43 major organizations and 28 sub-organizations as tenants. Some of these organizations are so large that, in addition to their headquarters at APG, they have support offices in many states as well as overseas. Most of these organizations are responsible for and manage a significant number of acquisition projects. Because of the expected retirement of a large number of senior leaders in the near future, I chose to conduct a survey of a select number of key agencies at APG to determine if they have succession plans in place for their key leadership positions. The intent of my research was to identify whether selected agencies were preparing their talented pool of employees for future senior level positions for the sake of a smooth transition. Thirty-seven of the 71 organizations were chosen to participate in the survey, based on the relatively large size of those organizations. Twelve survey questions were developed and issued to senior leaders of the selected 37 organizations. Four of those 37 leaders agreed to a face-to-face interview in addition to taking part in the written survey. Three questions were developed for the face-to-face interviews.

Ten written responses to the survey questionnaire were received. The written responses to the questionnaire plus the face-to-face interview responses brought responses to a total of 14 out of the 37 inquiries, producing a response rate of approximately 38 percent (Chart 2). This survey of APG organizations was conducted between Feb. 16 and March 14, 2011.

**Chart 2: Overview of Organizational Interactions**



## Research Hypotheses

There were two hypotheses for this research as follows:

H1: Select federal agencies at APG have a succession plan for key senior level positions.

H2: People identified for succession receive formal and informal training to prepare them for key senior level positions.

### **Research Instrument**

It was decided to conduct the survey of a selected number of key federal agencies at APG to determine if they had succession plans in place for their key senior level positions; and whether they were developing their selected pool of people for leadership positions. There were two lists of questions, one for an electronic written response and the other for a face-to-face interview. It was presumed that leaders who agreed to a face-to-face interview would have already read the 12-item survey questionnaire prior to the face-to-face interview. The intent was to make sure everyone was answering the same questions.

### **Survey Validity and Reliability**

The research questions were pilot tested in a small group of people (Senior Service College Fellowship (SSCF) at APG) to assure their completeness and accuracy. Comments received from SSC Fellows during the pilot test were addressed prior to the questionnaire issued for survey.

### **Literature Review**

For this study, a literature review was conducted to identify benefits of succession planning and issues related to its implementation. A literature review was also conducted to determine if a succession planning survey was previously done at any federal workplace and, if done, how it addressed the issue of succession planning in light of the merit system principles. No published surveys were found.



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## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

#### **Introduction**

The intent of this study was to validate that the federal agencies at APG have succession plans in place for their key senior level positions and that the individuals or a pool of individuals identified for succession are receiving the necessary training to prepare them for senior level positions. For the purposes of this study, a questionnaire was developed to obtain information from selected organization since some of the organizations at APG are very small in terms of the number of people they have at the location. Out of a total of 71 Federal organizations located at APG, 37 organizations were selected at random to participate in the survey. A questionnaire was sent to the senior-most executives of those 37 organizations. Of those 37 inquiries, written responses were received from 10 executives. In addition, four executives opted for a face-to-face interview making a total response number of 14 out of 37 inquiries (see Chart 2). This response rate of 38 percent is relatively small, but it provides a good insight of views of the surveyed organizations. It is presumed that the survey findings represent the pulse of all organizations at APG.

To respect confidentiality, names of the executives who responded to the survey are not listed in this report. Names of the 71 organizations at APG and the names of the 37 organizations selected for this study are noted in Appendix E. In addition, a literature review was conducted to identify federal policies, guidelines, experiences of other federal organizations and of industry. It was not the objective of this study to evaluate succession plan of any of the surveyed organization. This study attempted to provide status of succession planning of the surveyed organizations and of their best practices based upon their responses to the survey. It also provides recommendations based upon the survey findings and of the literature research findings.

#### **Survey Results and Analysis**

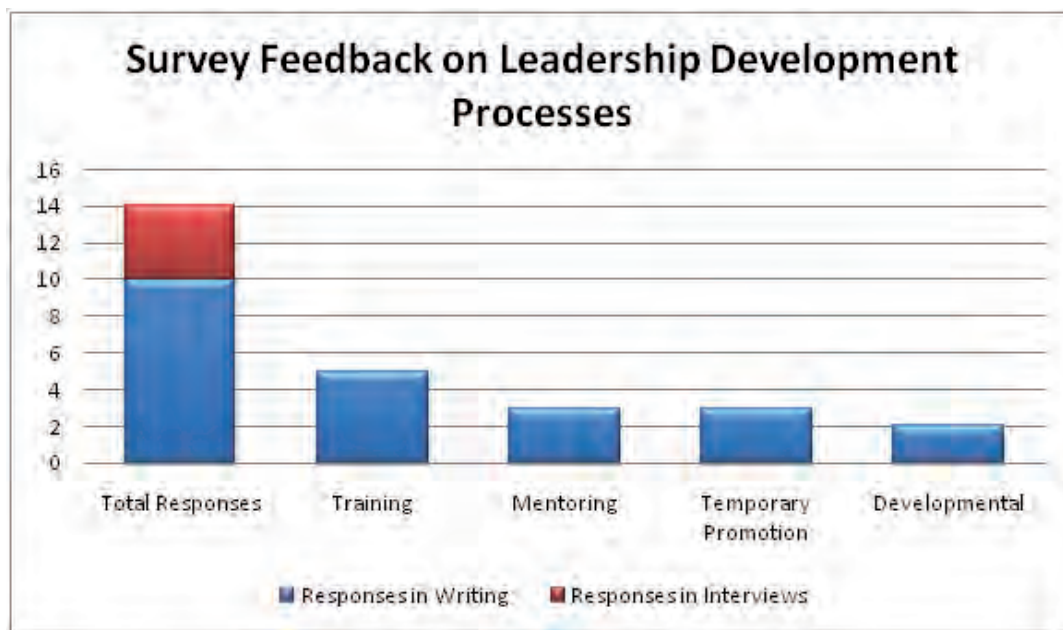
A key finding from the survey was that none of the organizations that participated in the survey had a formal succession plan for any of their key positions. All but one reported they do have an informal succession plan for their key positions. All of them cited that under the merit system principles they cannot identify and develop an individual to take a leadership position without an open and fair competition.

The merit system principles noted in Section 2301, Title 5 of United States Code, states that the recruitment of a federal worker should be determined solely on the basis of his/her relative ability, knowledge and skills, after fair and open competition to ensure that everyone receive an equal opportunity. Merit system principles also provide that all employees and applicants for employment should receive fair and equitable treatment in all aspects of personnel management without regard to political affiliation, race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, age, or handicapping condition, and with proper regard for their privacy and constitutional rights. Therefore, it is not possible for a Federal Government agency to select and groom a specific candidate without him/

her going through a fair and open competition. This poses a challenge for senior leaders on how to select and prepare candidates for senior level positions without their first going through an open and fair competition.

To prepare a pool of candidates for senior level positions in light of the merit system principles, some executives reported that they let their middle to senior managers attend all of their key meetings in order to expose them to their organizations' issues. That pool of candidates also gets exposure to senior level management through training, mentoring, temporary promotions and developmental assignments (Chart 3). This prepares them for senior level positions without any assurance that, by going through the development process, they would certainly get promoted to a senior position. To fill a vacancy, the agency uses open and fair competition to select the best candidate. The best candidate could be from within the agency or from outside of the agency. The same process for executive development and selection is used in industry.

**Chart 3: Survey Feedback on Leadership Development Processes**



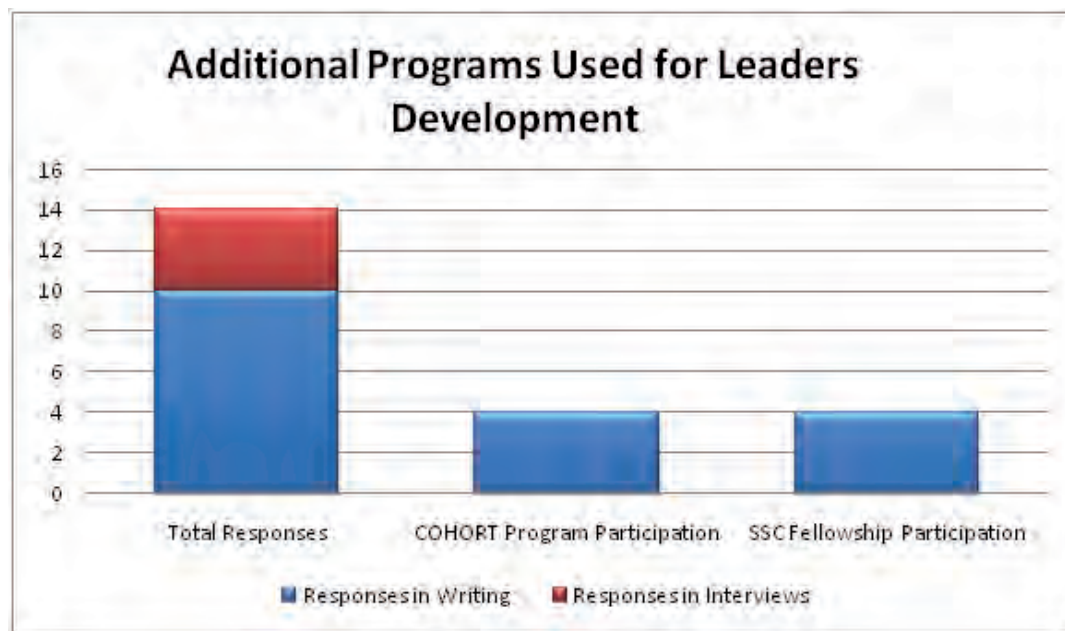
The Board of Directors of a large corporation often spends a significant period getting to know the pool of candidates, and the board's final selection could be a person within or outside the organization. Candidates within the organization could be those developed over the years, as in the case of government. The literature review identified five key principles that industry uses in selecting its executives, which parallel those used in Government succession planning:

1. Follow standard principles of human resource selection, such as thoroughly screening candidates. Speak to several people who have worked with the candidate. Background investigations are also very important.
2. Board members should be closely involved in evaluating highest-ranking managers.
3. Leadership succession should not be regarded as a detached, objective management decision. The emotional aspects of leadership succession should be considered.

4. A pool of candidates should be developed for a key leadership position.
5. Promote insiders with an outside perspective. Promoting people from within the organization offers the advantage of more hope to insiders.

Four of the executives responding to the survey said a candidate for a senior level position has to be very well exposed to external in addition to internal issues, and should have skills in addressing those issues through collaborations. One executive said a leader has to be aware of outside community issues in addition to the APG issues since he or she would be expected to interact with and satisfy all stakeholders. It was one of the key reasons for his starting of the COHORT program at APG. Under the APG COHORT program, a group of senior level people work together for approximately a year to get familiar with each other's organizational and community issues and recommend solutions for some of them. Four of those executives also said an ideal candidate or candidates should go through long-term leadership training such as that offered by the Army War College, Senior Service College, Industrial College of the Armed Forces (ICAF) or Naval Postgraduate School (Chart 4).

**Chart 4: Additional Programs Used for Leaders Development**

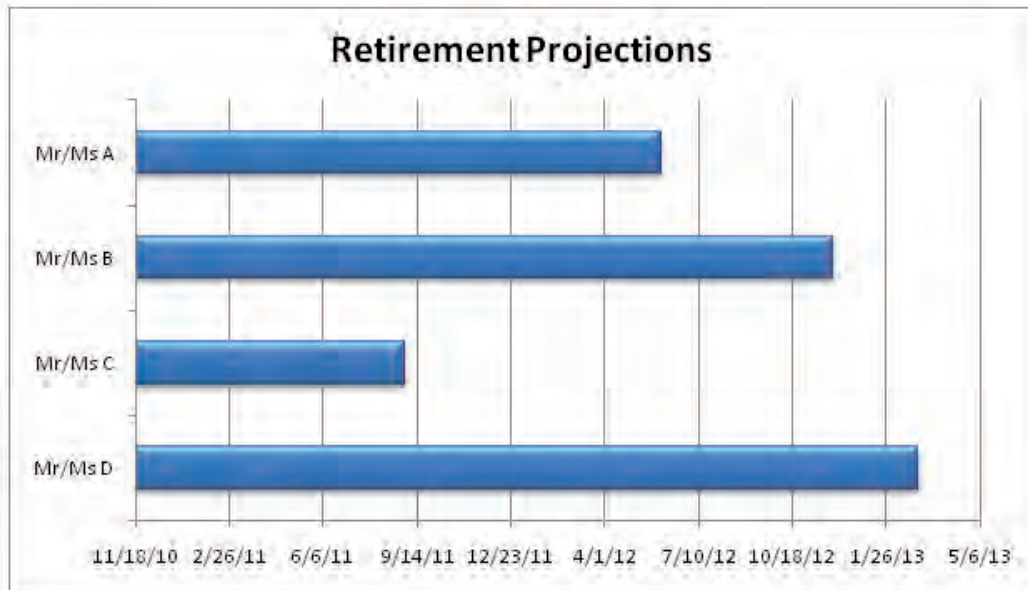


Another key finding from this study was that in the future there will be fewer resources available to do the same or a more complex job. Not only will there be less funding, there will also be a shortage of qualified people. Leaders are expected to do more with less. In order to accomplish the mission in an environment of increasingly constrained resources, a leader must identify, minimize, and address risk at every stage.

Two of the executives reported that for succession planning purposes they periodically project and keep track of key individuals who would be eligible to retire in the near future (Chart 5). They develop their action plans of what to do in case the key individual decides to retire when eligible to do so. They develop the potential candidates who can fill key positions until a permanent replacement is found. Both executives reported that they strongly endorse leadership training and

expect their supervisors to closely monitor and guide their employees when they develop their Individual Development Plans (IDP).

**Chart 5: Retirement Projections**



Reasons cited by some respondents for not having a succession plan were that it had a low priority in view of a recent increase in their workload and the prohibition per merit system principles against selecting and developing a specific candidate without an open and fair competition (Chart 6). Some respondents said their needs are filled through an open and fair competition and, thus, they don't have a sense of urgency about succession planning. However, all respondents said they intended to have a formal succession plan.

**Chart 6: Cited Reasons for Not Having a Succession Plan**

Key Reasons for Not Having a Succession Plan	
1.	Low priority
2.	Merit system principals limitations
3.	Competitive promotion process
4.	Flexibility for personnel to change jobs
5.	Objective met through other formal/informal methods
6.	Needs are getting met
7.	Rapidly changing environment
8.	Senior level support change

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Conclusion**

The preceding chapters of this research report indicated the vital importance of succession planning in an organization. The value and benefits of succession planning were demonstrated, especially during the change of an organization's leadership when there is a high risk of confusion and uncertainty. They list the advantages of succession planning and of how it assures and gives confidence to people within an organization and to its external stakeholders that the program would continue without any immediate major change to the program. It was shown how organizations in the private sector changed their key leaders without causing any turmoil or impacting the organization's performance. The report described reasons the public sector differs from the private sector in planning and execution for succession of its key leaders and how it addresses those differences.

The central theme of this report is planning, preparation, and execution of activities to achieve a successful succession. The research in support of this study identified the views of senior leaders of federal agencies at APG, their limitations under the merit system program and how they are addressing their limitations.

#### **Strength and Limitations of this Study**

A key limitation of this research study is that it focused on a very small number of federal agencies at APG. Another key limitation is that the senior-most leaders of organizations were contacted to participate in the survey. Given their extremely busy schedule, it was not expected that the response rate from senior leaders would be high. The number of senior leaders or their representatives who responded to the survey was 14 out of the 37 requested to participate in the survey. That comes to a response rate of 38 percent. It is a relatively small response rate on which to base a conclusive finding. Even though the response rate is small, it still gives a good insight on APG's senior-most leaders' views on succession planning. Were this study conducted again, the senior managers responsible for succession planning should be requested to participate in the survey.

The strength of this research study is that it captures the current thinking of many of the senior-most leaders of APG. All respondents to the survey, however, indicated their strong sensitivity to succession planning and their desire to have an effective succession plan in place. They listed actions they have taken and/or supporting towards succession planning.

#### **Interpretation of Research Findings and Recommendations**

The following are the interpretation of research findings and recommendations:

**Research Finding No. 1:** All responders were fully aware of the merits of succession planning. All responders indicated that their organization did not have any formal succession plan in place but were following an informal process to develop their pool of



people for leadership positions.

**Recommendation No. 1:** All organizations should identify their key positions and have formal succession plans in place for those positions. The plans should identify what a candidate needs to do prepare himself/herself for that position.

**Research Finding No. 2:** Five of the 14 responders noted that they encourage their workforce to obtain the necessary training. They encourage leadership training to those who are interested in key leadership/management positions. They noted that an individual's training is tracked through his/her IDP. They also encourage and support people in obtaining any necessary acquisition certifications.

**Recommendation No. 2:** All employees should have an IDP and it should be updated periodically to ensure it reflects the intent of the employee. Guide employees as necessary in preparing for what they want to achieve.

**Research Finding No. 3:** Three of the 14 respondents noted that they develop their talented workers through mentoring and by putting them in senior positions on temporary basis. Two of the 14 responders noted that they train their talented workers by putting them on temporary assignments. One respondent said his organization cross-trains a select group of talented people on different functions. By doing so, his organization develops a pool of candidates for senior-level positions as the merit system program prohibits selection and development of a single candidate without a fair and open competition.

**Recommendation No. 3:** All developmental tools should be considered prior to selection of a specific set of tools required to address an individual's needs. The selected tools should be applied rigorously, and the progress of the individual should be tracked.

**Research Finding No. 4:** Four of the 14 respondents noted that they support the APG COHORT program as well as the SSCF program. They said those programs as well other long-term leadership development programs expose participants to leadership challenges and to issues related to the entire APG as well as local communities. They believed that this wide exposure to issues prepares employees for a broad range of senior level positions.

**Recommendation No. 4:** Participation in the APG COHORT program, SSCF program or any other long-term programs such as the Army War College and ICAF should be encouraged for the selection and preparation of personnel for senior leadership positions.

**Research Finding No. 5:** Two of the 14 responders noted they develop and use projection charts to keep track of which of their key leaders would become eligible to retire which month in the near future. They update this projection chart periodically. They plan what, how, and when to take actions to get ready to fill that slot with a right candidate. It helps them plan to address this issue in advance.

**Recommendation No. 5:** Leaders should use forecasting tools to project their future

needs/vacancies and develop an action plan to address those needs on a timely basis for sake of program continuity and success.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Actions to be taken in following up this study are relatively simple and straightforward. Knowing the importance of succession planning as validated by a consensus of those who responded to this study's survey, all organizations need to play an active role in development and implementation of their succession plans.

Under this study, an attempt was made to obtain succession planning related information from 37 of the existing 71 organizations at APG. A future study should follow up on the 14 organizations that responded to the survey to identify the progress of their succession planning. Another broader study should investigate all 71 organizations' efforts on succession planning. It is hoped that because they received the succession planning survey questionnaire, some, if not all, of the surveyed 37 organizations may have realized the importance of succession planning. The next study should investigate issues that organizations encountered or are encountering during development and execution of their succession plans. The next study should also investigate and capture the best practices on succession planning of the organizations. The study should investigate and document their successes as well as their failures for the benefit of other organizations that still have to do their succession planning.



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## **GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND TERMS**

APG	Aberdeen Proving Ground
AT&L	Acquisition, Technology and Logistics
BRAC	Base Realignment and Closure
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CTMP	Civilian Talent Management Program
DAG	Defense Acquisition Guidebook
DAU	Defense Acquisition University
DoD	Department of Defense
FERS	Federal Employee Retirement System
GAO	General Accounting Office
IDP	Individual Development Plan
ICAF	Industrial College of the Armed Forces
H	Hypothesis
IDP	Individual Development Plan
NDEP	National Defense Education Program
NSF	National Science Foundation
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
QDR	Quadrennial Defense Review
S&E	Science and Engineering
SES	Senior Executive Service
SSCF	Senior Service College Fellowship
USD(AT&L)	Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics

## **APPENDIX A**

### **SURVEY INSTRUMENT**

#### **Succession Planning Survey**

##### **Cover Letter**

APG Senior Leader/Manager:

It was a pleasure to brief at the APG leadership luncheon on February 16. It is an excellent forum for exchanging ideas amongst senior leaders. I hope I was clear in delivering my message on succession planning.

In follow-up to my briefing enclosed is an electronic copy of the subject survey and my briefing. The survey is in support of my senior service college research project. It is designed to be filled by individuals responsible for succession planning in federal agencies at APG. Please let me know the name of the person responsible for succession planning in your organization so as I can contact him/her directly. I would also appreciate and welcome any comment/suggestion that you may have on succession planning.

My goal for completion of the survey is March 7, 2011, so as I can complete and issue a report by April 13, 2011. Please let me know if I can provide any further information. Thanks.

## Survey Content

### SUCCESSION PLANNING SURVEY

**Organization:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Official Doing the Survey:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Research Title:** The use of succession planning to prepare future leaders in selected federal agencies at Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD.

**Research Topic:** To identify whether or not federal agencies located at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, use succession planning for their key senior level positions. Identify how the selected people get prepared for key positions.

*Participation in this survey is voluntary. Identify of those who respond will be kept confidential.*

#### Survey Questions:

1. Does your organization have a succession plan for every key senior level position (Branch Chief and higher)?

Yes      No      Do not know

*If yes, please list criteria used by your organization to call a position as a "key senior level position."*

*(Go to question no. "9" if the answer is "No" or "Do not know".)*

2. Does your organization's succession plans require a formal/informal training and/or mentorship of individuals identified to fill key senior level positions?

Yes      No      Do not know

If yes, please identify typical types of training (formal vs. informal) and mentorship.

*(Go to question no. "9" if the answer is "No" or "Do not know".)*

3. Does the formal training cover technical, management and/or organization specific topics?  
Please list types (technical, management and/or organization specific) and duration of training.

4. Please identify sources of training.

5. Does your organization provide informal training (on-the-job training and/or observations and/or experiential learning and/or others) to individuals identified to fill key senior level positions?  
How are the scope and duration of the informal training determined?

6. Does your organization mentor individuals identified to fill key senior level positions?  
Yes      No      Do not know

If yes, please identify whether the mentorship is formal or informal and duration of mentorship.

*(Go to question no. "9" if the answer is "No" or "Do not know".)*

7. What methodology is used to assess that the required formal/informal training and/or mentorship has met the need?

8. Does your organization provide a refresher formal/informal training and/or mentorship to individuals after they have been selected to fill key senior level positions?

How is a refresher formal/informal training and/or mentorship need determined, fulfilled and tracked?

9. List methods used by your organization to prepare newly hired individuals (from within or outside of your organization) for key senior level positions, if it does not have or follow formal

succession plans.

10. List key reasons your organization does not have succession plans for key senior level positions, if that is the case.

11. Overall, how effective is succession planning in your organization?

Very successful    1       3       4       5       Not successful at all

12. If your organization has and uses succession plans, how does it comply with Merit Protection Board's requirements to not preselect that a candidate not be preselected to fill a position without a fair and open competition?



## **APPENDIX B**


### **Interview Questions**

The following are representative of the questions asked during the senior executive interviews. The interviews were not structured so that all questions were asked of all those interviewed.

1. Existence of a succession plan in the organization
  - a. Does your organization have a succession plan?
  - b. How does your plan work, and how effective is it?
  - c. If you do not have a plan, how will your key positions get backfilled without negatively impacting your program/projects?
2. Issues with effective succession planning.
3. How do you address implementation issues?

## APPENDIX C

The following briefing was given at the Senior Executives—General Officers luncheon at the U.S. Army Materiel Systems Analysis Activity's conference room at APG on Feb. 6, 2011, to introduce the group about the study and to request their support in identifying whether federal agencies at APG have a succession plan for their key positions; succession planning-related issues in federal agencies; and industry's position on succession planning.




**US ARMY CHEMICAL MATERIALS AGENCY**

Use of Succession Planning To Develop  
Future Leaders in Federal Agencies At APG

16 February 2011

Presented to:  
Senior Executive Service Group at APG

Presented by:  
Raj K. Malhotra  
Senior Service College Fellow, APG, MD



**US ARMY CHEMICAL MATERIALS AGENCY**

Purpose of Briefing

**Purpose of Briefing:** To inform and solicit leadership's support in conducting this survey to determine whether or not federal agencies at Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD have succession planning in place for their key positions, and methodologies they follow to prepare future leaders.

- In my research report I will list the survey findings and issues that agencies encountered as a result of implementing their succession plans.
- I will not assess or develop a correlation between the methods used by agencies with success of their planning.
- I will list industry's position on succession planning and key best practices.

2



US ARMY CHEMICAL MATERIALS AGENCY

## Hypothesis

**Hypothesis 1:** Federal agencies at APG have succession plans for key senior level positions.

**Hypothesis 2:** People identified for succession receive formal and informal training to prepare them for key senior level positions.

3



US ARMY CHEMICAL MATERIALS AGENCY

## Succession Planning

- **Scope of Research:**

1. Identify whether or not federal agencies at APG have a succession plan for their key positions;
2. Succession planning related issues in federal agencies;
3. Industry's position on succession planning

- **Methods of Research:**

1. Survey federal agencies at APG
2. Literature research

- **Completion Date of Report:** 13 April 2011

4



## Federal Agencies vs. Private Industry

US ARMY CHEMICAL MATERIALS AGENCY

- **Federal Agencies' Limitations:**

1. Merit protection program prohibits pre-selection of a candidate and preparing him/her for a position without an open and fair competition
2. No restriction in developing a pool of candidates

- **Private Industry:**

1. No restrictions
2. Succession planning is encouraged and is done for key positions

5



## Request for Information

US ARMY CHEMICAL MATERIALS AGENCY

**Request your support in obtaining input from your succession planning person**

Findings from the report may help federal agencies at APG understand status of current succession planning as well as assist them in developing stronger succession plans.

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## APPENDIX D

### ORGANIZATIONS LOCATED AT APG

1st Area Medical Laboratory (1st AML)	Electronics Research, Development and Engineering Center (CERDEC)
9th Area Medical Laboratory (9th AML)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program Executive Office for Command, Control, Communications Tactical (PEO C3T)</li> </ul>
20th Support Command (CBRNE) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22nd Chemical Battalion</li> <li>• CBRNE Analytical &amp; Remediation Activity (CARA)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program Executive Office for Intelligence, Electronic Warfare and Sensors (PEO IEW&amp;S)</li> </ul>
29th Combat Aviation Brigade and 29th Infantry Division (Light)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. Army Contracting Command, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ACC-APG) (C4ISR)</li> </ul>
5th-80th Ordnance Battalion (Army Reserve)	
203rd Military Intelligence Battalion	
712th Contingency Contracting Team (CCT)	
Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES)	US Army Contracting Command (ACC) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aberdeen Proving Ground Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ACC-APG) (C4ISR)</li> </ul>
U.S. Army Audit Agency (AAA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aberdeen Proving Ground Soldier, Chemical, Research and Test(ACC-APG) (SCRT)</li> </ul>
U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency (CMA)	
U.S. Army Civilian Human Resource Agency (CHRA) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. Army Civilian Human Resource Agency, Northeast Region</li> <li>• Civilian Personnel Advisory Center (CPAC)</li> <li>• Northeast Civilian Personnel Operations Center (NECPOC)</li> </ul>	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers APG (COE)
U.S. Army Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Sensors and Reconnaissance Team (C4ISR) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. Army Communications and Electronics Command (CECOM) —Software Engineering Center —Logistics and Readiness Center</li> <li>• U.S. Army Communications</li> </ul>	U.S. Army Counterintelligence, 902MI
	Defense Commissary APG
	Defense Logistics Agency, Document Services (DLA-DS)
	Defense Military Pay Office (DMPO)
	Defense Logistics Agency, Disposition Services Field Office at Aberdeen(formerly DRMO)

Defense Logistics Agency, Land and Maritime (DLA Land)	(ATEC) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. Army Development Test Command (DTC)</li> <li>• U.S. Aberdeen Test Center (ATC)</li> <li>• U.S. Army Evaluation Center (AEC)</li> </ul>
Office of Personnel Management Federal Investigative Services (OPMFIS)	
U.S. Army Dental Clinic Command (DENTAC)	U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Chemical Defense (MRICD)
U.S. Army Element, Assembled Chemical Weapons Alternatives (ACWA)	NGB-IR Program Branch
U.S. Army Installation Management Command (IMCOM) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. Army Environmental Command (USAEC)</li> <li>• Family, Morale Welfare Recreation Command (FMWR)</li> <li>• U.S. Army Garrison Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG)</li> </ul>	Ordnance Center and Schools (OC&S) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 143rd Ordnance Battalion</li> <li>• U.S. Marine Corps 2100th Detachment</li> </ul>
Free state Challenge Academy	U.S. Postal Service (USPS)
Joint Personal Effects Depot (JPED)	Program Executive Office, Integration (PEO, I) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combined Test Organization</li> <li>• Deputy Program Manager Networks</li> </ul>
Joint Program Executive Office for Chemical Biological Defense (JPEO-CBD)	U.S. Army Public Health Command (USAPHC)
Joint Personal Effects Depot (JPED)	U.S. Army Research, Development and Engineering Command (RDECOM) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. Army RDECOM Managerial Accounting Division</li> <li>• U.S. Army Armament Research, Development &amp; Engineering Center Firing Tables &amp; Ballistics Team (ARDEC FTB)</li> <li>• U.S. Army Communications Electronics Research, Development and Engineering Center (CERDEC)</li> <li>• U.S. Army Edgewood Chemical Biological Center (ECBC)</li> <li>• U.S. Army Materiel Systems Analysis Activity (AMSAA)</li> </ul>
U.S. Army Kirk Health Clinic (Kirk)	
U.S. Army Materiel Command Band (AMC Band)	
U.S. Army National Ground Intelligence Center (NGIC)	
U.S. Army Research Laboratory (ARL) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human Research and Engineering Directorate</li> <li>• Survivability and Lethality Analysis Directorate</li> <li>• Vehicle Technology Directorate</li> </ul>	U.S. Army Research Institute (ARI)
U.S. Army Test and Evaluation Command	U.S. Army Signal Network Enterprise Center APG (USASNEC APG)

TACOM, Clothing & Heraldry, Product  
Integration Directorate (C&H PSID)

U.S. Army TMDE Support Center (TMDE)

U.S. Army Trial Defense Services

Veterinary Clinics